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JOHN ROBINSON AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE PILGRIM MOVEMENT

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The scope of this article is strictly limited. It takes no account of the great issues, social, national, and international, which, in the course of time, flowed from the few simple folk "in the north parts" of England about Scrooby and Gainsborough who obeyed what they believed to be a divine impulse.

Others far more competent for the purpose have already dealt with, or will deal with, these. Nor does it do more than touch the details of the life into which the exiles passed at Amsterdam and Leyden. For on these, Dr. Dexter and his son — to mention but two of the workers in this field¹ — may almost be said to have spoken the last word. Nor does it follow the Pilgrims into the new world where they struck root with such heroic fortitude, except so far as is required to correct one or two somewhat inveterate mistakes. It is, in fact, limited to the man who, beyond any one else, was the chief spiritual influence in those earliest pioneers whose character and ideals imparted a permanent direction to the development of New England. At the same time, while relating the substance of what is known of Robinson, I have tried to state the truth with regard to the circumstances in which the Pilgrim movement took its start; and if, in so doing, it has seemed necessary to criticize adversely the conclusions of one writer in particular, my excuse must be that his narrative has been accepted, in some high quarters, as that of an authority on the subject whose word is final. It is not by any means final, as the sequel, I think, will show.

¹ See *The England and Holland of the Pilgrims*, 1906. Bk. VI, chap 3.

I

It is known that Robinson's early home and probably his birthplace was Sturton-en-le-Steeple² — a village on the Nottingham side of the Trent, some five miles southwest of Gainsborough on the Lincoln side, and ten miles southeast of Scrooby. His father, also named John, seems to have been a yeoman, or owner and tiller of his own farm; and from the contents of his will as well as from those of his wife³ we may judge him to have been fairly well-to-do.

To the same village belonged another yeoman apparently of greater estate, named Alexander White. Thus, the Whites and Robinsons were neighbors, and their young people grew up together. In the case of two of them, at least, companionship produced affection; for Bridget, second daughter of the Whites, became Robinson's wife. Robinson was born about 1575.⁴ The first seventeen years of his life are a blank. Nothing is clear before April 9, 1592, the date of his admission to Corpus Christi or Benet College, Cambridge. His status as a sizar would not be free from hardships; but we may presume that he faced them with the cheerful courage of an enthusiast for learning. His career, at any rate, was not undistinguished. It extended over nearly twelve years. Besides proceeding to the usual degrees of B.A. and M.A. he was made Fellow of his college and "Prælector Graecus" in 1598, and "Decanus" in 1600. A fellowship entailed ordination, and by 1602 Robinson had become Priest. After a further two years of college life there

² This discovery was made by Rev. W. H. Burgess, B.A. (author of *John Smith the Se-Baptist*) and communicated to the *Christian Life* (February, 1911), London, and to the *Christian Register* (Boston).

³ Wills in District Registry at York. Vol. 33, fo. 236; vol. 34, fo. 324. Cited by Burgess in his *John Smith, etc.*, p. 317. Mr. Champlin Burrage prints Mr. Robinson's will in Appendix D. Vol. I, pp. 326, 327 of his *Early English Dissenters*, 1912.

⁴ An inference from the fact that when admitted to be a member of Leyden University on August 5, 1615, he was in his 39th year.

occurred what seems an abrupt change;⁵ he resigned his fellowship and on February 15, 1603, was married to Bridget White at Greasley⁶ in Nottingham.

The home to which he took her was in Norwich, where, for some short time before, he had been installed as a minister of St. Andrew's Church.⁷ It may be that he was indebted for the appointment to the nomination of Jegon, the Bishop of Norwich, whom he had known as Master of Corpus Christi; but if so, it is not likely that the bishop knew of Robinson's already strong tendency away from the church. Just when and how this originated cannot be traced with precision. There was, however, quite enough to account for it in his Cambridge environment — not to mention the Puritan influences which may have been around him in his home. Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) though a proscribed man, was still a name of power. Francis Johnson (1562–1618), though now a leader of the Brownists, was not forgotten. The Puritan fervor which conduced to Robert Browne's (1550?–1633) popularity as a preacher in 1579 had by no means died out. It was aglow in Emmanuel College, and, with less heat, in St. John's. William Perkins (1558–1602), moreover, at Great St. Andrew's was a lecturer of uncompromising Puritan temper. So too, on the whole, was his successor, Paul

⁵ Might there be a connection between this and the agitation which arose about the Millenary Petition and led Cambridge (June 9, 1603) to pass a "grace that whoever in that University should attack the doctrine or discipline of the Church of England should be suspended from all degrees already taken and forbidden all others"? Dexter, E. H., p. 337.

⁶ An extensive parish about ten miles west of Nottingham. Why this place should have been chosen for the marriage seems to be accounted for by the fact (recently brought to light) that one of Bridget White's brothers occupied a farm in the parish. For entry of the marriage, see Phillimore and Blagg's Nottinghamshire Parish Registers. Vol. VIII, p. 99. Robinson and his wife are entered as Mr. and Mistress.

⁷ He was not himself a member of St. Andrews "having" (he says) "my house . . . within another parish and my children baptized there." Burrage, N. F., p. 17. For names of his family, see Dexter's E. H. P., p. 632. Two of his six children were born in Norwich, John and Bridget. Isaac, the third, was 92 years old in 1702, which gives 1610 as the year of his birth (Arber, p. 160).

Burgess. Nor must we forget the presence at Cambridge of John Smith (d. 1612) — sizar, graduate, and Fellow of Christ's College. For six years at least he was Robinson's contemporary. He, likewise, was from the north country. Nay, they may have been known to each other as natives of the same village and schoolfellows.⁸ Smith, even as late as 1604, was not yet a Separatist; but he was a decided Puritan, and it is most natural to suppose that the two would often, or sometimes, meet and that Smith by reason of his riper knowledge would find in his younger companion a respectful listener. Robinson, in fact, owed much to Smith, and never disowned the debt — however widely or sharply he came to differ. And the debt began at Cambridge. From Cambridge to Norwich was a passage from one Puritan centre to another. There Robert Browne had constituted his church in 1581. There a remnant of that church survived in 1602 and formed a climax to lower degrees of "nonconformity in the city" or its neighborhood. St. Andrew's Church for example, as is evident by the character of its vicars,⁹ had Puritan preferences and is said¹⁰ to have purchased the right of presentation in order to indulge them. Robinson calls himself minister, not vicar, though he may have been vicar all the same.

Mr. Burrage suggests that his position was practically Congregationalist. But this is going too far.¹¹ St. Andrew's by its purchase of the right to present may have been

⁸ Mr. Burgess writes in the *Hibbert Journal*, October 2, 1916, p. 176, "I have . . . come to the conclusion that he was the fourth son of one 'John Smyth,' yeoman, of Sturton-le-Steeple. . . . There are several pieces of evidence which point to this young John Smith as being the man, none of them, indeed, decisive but weighty in their cumulative effect."

⁹ Mr. John More, vicar in Robert Browne's time, was a Puritan — so was Mr. John Yates, vicar after 1616.

¹⁰ Burrage, *N. F.*, p. 21.

¹¹ Burrage, *ibid.*, p. 21. Robinson himself says: "The way by which the ministers of St. Andrew's enter is not the plain way of the Lord but the crooked path of a Lord Bishop's ordination and approbation and of a Patron's presentation, yea whether the people will or no." *Ibid.*, p. 19.

able to secure members inclined to omit or change some ceremonies and preach sound doctrine, but it was no less a part of the established order and subject to episcopal rule. And Robinson was content to have it so for a time. Joseph Hall (1574–1656) says¹² he took his first avowed step towards Separatism when he “refused the Prelacy” and his second when he “branded the ceremonies.” This might seem an inversion of the historic truth. Usually it had been the ceremonies that were first questioned, then the prelacy. But the tyranny of the prelates had thrust itself to the forefront of the Puritan outlook by Robinson’s time, and so their removal had really come to seem the first step in the way of a radical reform. By the middle of 1604, prelatical influence with the king and in Convocation had brought to pass the new canons — one hundred and forty-one of them — which aimed to reconstruct the church, and incidentally to strangle every sign of dissent. No wonder if Robinson was moved thereby to declare his “refusal of the Prelacy.” Then when he refused subscription to the canons, some time after December, 1604, by so doing he virtually “branded the ceremonies.” He paid the immediate penalty in suspension. As a married man, with one or two children, the consequent suffering could not be simply his own, and he had to seek some other means of living. Mr. Hall reports that he sought it by applying for the mastership of St. Giles’s Hospital, and, failing this, for a lease to serve as city preacher.¹³ The same kind pen lays it down as something certain that if the application had succeeded, there would have been an end to his thoughts of separation. This is mere slander. But it is true that failure led to his leaving both city and church.

¹² In his *Common Apologie against the Brownists* . . . Hall, future Bishop of Exeter and Norwich, had probably known Robinson at Cambridge, and was now (1610) vicar of Waltham, Essex.

¹³ A *Common Apologie of the Church of England*, p. 145. Cf. the case of John Smith as Preacher to the City of Lincoln, 1600–02.

The landmarks for the next year or two are few and faint. What there are suggest a state of mental strife. Our clearest glimpse of him is at Cambridge, where he had come in hope to find satisfaction for a troubled heart, and where in fact he seems to have found it. For on a Sabbath, going to hear Laurence Chaderton (1536?–1640) at St. Clemens in the morning, and Paul Baynes (d. 1617) at Great St. Andrew's in the afternoon, both these preachers (as he deemed, providentially) so expounded their subjects as to reinforce the "very reasons," which to his mind, made most surely for the last step.¹⁴ Before his visit he had been "amongst some company of the separation,"¹⁵ perhaps at Gainsborough, and in "exercising," or preaching to them, had "renounced his former ministry." But he was still haunted by misgivings, and the Cambridge "experience" may be taken as marking the hour of final decision. Then he returned to Gainsborough or Scrooby. By this time, 1607, the people of the Separation had become "two bands," though still one church. Their accepted pastor was John Smith, late preacher to the city of Lincoln, who had come to Gainsborough early in 1606. His treatment by the High Commission (in 1606) drove him forward,¹⁶ through nine months of doubt, to the conclusion that the Church of England was not the Church of Christ. There were those in the town and district who inclined to the same view. These — at the end of 1606 or in the beginning of 1607 — he gathered together "as the Lord's free people" into a "covenant," viz., "to walk in all his ways made known, or to be made known, unto men, according to their best endeavours, whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them."¹⁷

¹⁴ P. 20 of Robinson's *Manumission*, 1615.

¹⁵ P. 29 of Ames's *Second Manuduction*, 1625.

¹⁶ Whitley, J. S. Vol. I, pp. lvi, lvii.

¹⁷ Burgess, Smith, p. 85. The terms of the covenant are reported by Bradford (*History*, p. 13). If Smith indited the form, he might be indebted for the substance to Francis Johnson or even Robert Browne.

This broad and simple formula, which certainly emanated from Smith, was the basis of the new movement and its bond of fellowship. Robinson took it gladly, and wished for nothing better. With merely verbal alterations and extensions it served him and his people to the end. Why, on his return, he chose to cast in his lot with the Scrooby rather than the Gainsborough group is not clear. Perhaps because those at Scrooby had most need of him, or perhaps because they were more congenial to him. For it was the group which included William Brewster, William Bradford, and Richard Clifton — “the grave and reverend preacher who by his pains and diligence had done much good and under God had been the means of the conversion of many.” But neither Clifton nor Robinson held office in the group. If the two groups made up the church, with Smith as pastor, there would be no need or desire to elect another. The need only arose at a later time when a cleavage between the two groups took place at Amsterdam. While at Scrooby, Robinson’s relation to the group, as also Clifton’s, was that of an unofficial preacher.

II

When Smith appeared at Gainsborough and Robinson at Scrooby, the way had been prepared for them. Bradford relates how “by the travail and diligence of some godly and zealous preachers, and God’s blessing on their labours, as in other places of the land, so in the north parts, many became enlightened by the word of God” (*History*, pp. 11, 12). Before 1849, when Mr. Joseph Hunter issued his *Collections concerning the Early History of the Founders of New Plymouth*, the vague statement — “in the north parts” — excited mere conjecture. Bradford’s further statement that the north parts meant “sundry villages and towns, some in Nottingham, some of Lincolnshire and some of Yorkshire where they border nearest

together," narrowed the field, but gave no definite clue. It was Hunter who identified Austerfield in Yorkshire as the native place of Bradford, and Scrooby Manor, in Nottinghamshire, as the home of William Brewster and the Separatist meeting-house (pp. 8-11). Other identifications followed naturally and cleared up the question of locality once for all. It was Hunter also who first illustrated Bradford's incidental reference to Richard Clifton by particulars of his ministerial career and family connections (pp. 18 ff., more fully in the revised edition of 1854, pp. 40-98). It was he again, who annotated the general reference to "godly and zealous preachers" by directing attention to such Puritan preachers of the neighborhood as Thomas Toller of Sheffield (p. 20, and in 1854 ed., pp. 48, 49), Richard Bernard of Worksop (pp. 20, 21, and in 1854 ed., pp. 35-40), Robert Gifford of Laughton-en-le-Northen, adjoining Worksop (1854 ed., pp. 49, 50), and Hugh Bromehead of North Wheatley (1854 ed., pp. 51, 52 and App. No. 4, pp. 163-172). Finally, it was Hunter who drew out the story of William Brewster (pp. 21-39, cf. 1854 ed., pp. 53-88) and of William Bradford (pp. 44-51, cf. 1854 ed., pp. 99-120). At the same time, he depicted the physical features of the country (called the Basset Law) and the general character of its population; the prevalence of Roman Catholic religious houses; and the *a priori* unlikelihood, therefore, that it should be the scene of a Puritan harvest (pp. 15, 16; 1854 ed., pp. 24-28). In fine, Hunter had good right to claim that the new facts which he brought to light have "changed the face of the whole history of the movement, so long as the actors in it remained in England" (Preface to 1854 ed.).

Later research has somewhat enlarged the number of "new facts," particularly in relation to Robinson and Smith; but to him is due the praise of a pioneer who cleared a path where there seemed an impasse, and evoked an impulse to follow it up which accounts for the work of

the Dexters and many another. Among the facts brought to light by Hunter was one which he found in a return made to the Exchequer by the Archbishop of York, Toby Matthew on the 13th of November, 1608, to the effect that Richard Jackson, William Brewster, and Robert Rochester, all of Scrooby in the County of Nottingham, Brownists or Separatists, were liable "for a fine of £20 apiece (p. 131, 1854 ed.).

This he speaks of as the single instance of legal proceedings against the "Basset-Law Nonconformists" which he had come across. Dexter (p. 320, note) cited another from the MS. records of the ecclesiastical court at York. This was the case of Joan, wife of Thomas Helwys of Broxtowe, with regard to whom action was taken on January 26, 1607-8, and again later in the same year. After commitment to York Castle, she was brought before the High Commissioners, and, declining to incriminate herself (by the oath *ex officio*) was sent back to prison in the castle; where probably she remained till in due course she was banished the realm. John Drews and Thomas Jessop, "for refusing to take the oath according to law," were remanded to prison at the same time and with the same fate (Burgess, *Story of John Smith*, p. 116). A further case was that of "Gervase Nevyle (or Nevile) of Scrowbie," described as "a very dangerous schismatical Separatist, Brownist, and irreligious subject." He appeared before the ecclesiastical Court at York, on March 22, 1607-8,¹⁸ and, after refusal to take oath and make answer, or to recognize the authority of the Archbishop,

¹⁸ He was arraigned first, by the High Commissioners on November 10, 1607, and committed "to jail in the Castle of York for trial and further proceedings." These took place on March 22, 1608, and, meanwhile he had remained a prisoner; for the indictment on the latter date runs — "Gervase Nevile of York Castle, Brownist or Separatist." Dr. Usher (*The Pilgrims and their History*) seems not to be aware of the trial on March 22, else he could hardly say (p. 261) "Neville was permitted to testify without taking the oath and though committed to prison for a time was, after no long confinement, released without further examination or trial." "Indeed Neville was handled with considerable charity" (p. 21).

he was delivered by "strait-warrant to the hands, ward, and strait custody of the Keeper of His Majesty's Castle of York, not permitting him to have any liberty or conference with any without special license" (Brown, *P. E.*, pp. 94, 95).

In a book entitled *The Pilgrims and their History* by Roland G. Usher, Ph.D. (1918), the writer says: "It must be owned that from what we know of the activity of the High Commission elsewhere, the treatment the Scrooby congregation received was far from severe." There are a number of slight inaccuracies in the context of this summary judgment which do not predispose the reader to receive it with implicit faith. One has been indicated in a previous note; a second is the writing of Richard Johnson for Richard Jackson, and the adding of Francis Jessop of Worksop to the list of those summoned in December, 1607;¹⁹ a third is the saying that no other persons than the five named were accused of Separatism, Baroism, (*sic?*) — apparently in ignorance of Joan Helwys, John Drews, and Thomas Jessop; and a fourth is implied in the assertion that in these cases (the five), the failure of the authorities to pursue them with "fines, excommunications, and attachments," shows that prosecution was initiated not by them but by some private individual. For there was no such failure, if it be true that an attachment was awarded to William Blanchard to apprehend Richard Jackson and William Brewster, and that each of these was fined £20. True, the authorities did not go the length of excommunication. But what would have happened if Brewster had not escaped? ²⁰

¹⁹ I find no other mention of him in this connection, nor does Dr. Usher give any reference. According to Hunter, Francis Jessop seems to have resided at Heyton or Tilne, Scrooby. It was his nephew, Wortley Jessop, who resided at Scrofton in the parish of Worksop. Collections, ed. 1854, pp. 126, 127.

²⁰ One or two other slips may be mentioned. Thus (p. 4) Scrooby is said to be fifty miles north of Lincoln instead of about sixteen miles northwest, and (p. 26) it is said, "Two years before (i.e., in 1606) Smyth's congregation had gone from their own little district to Holland," although the church was not gathered before the end of 1606, and

These, however, are trifles compared with the mistake involved in Dr. Usher's general standpoint. He may be said not unfairly to have taken up a brief for the ecclesiastical authorities and against the Puritans, against the Separatists especially. The outcome of this is insistence upon three remarkable propositions. The first is that what persecution befell the Scrooby congregation before 1607 was occasioned entirely by hostile neighbors. "From the authorities at London and from the ecclesiastics at York had thus far come neither reproaches nor interference." The reason for this lay in the tolerant temper of Archbishop Hutton and their own social or numerical insignificance. There came a change for the worse only with the accession of Toby Matthew, 1607. Even then severity began and ended with the five cases aforesaid. So says Dr. Usher. And I do not deny Archbishop Hutton's tolerant temper nor its effect in sparing the Scrooby people. But their comparative immunity had other causes as well. In part, it was due to the fact that the canons were not enforced in the northern province until the Convocation of York had adopted them, and that this was not done before March 10, 1606.²¹ So the question is, what did the authorities do after that date? And the answer

Smith could still write himself "Pastor of the church at Gainsborough" in 1607 (see Letter of Smith to Bernard. Whitley, S. Vol. II, p. 331) and both companies were in Holland by August, 1608. Dr. Usher's great learning and competence, as exhibited particularly in his *Reconstruction of the English Church* — a work for which every serious student of the subject is thankful — appear to fail him whenever he touches on the Separatists. For a glaring example I may refer to Introduction (p. xxiv) of his *Presbyterian Movement in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (1905) where he says, "It was in 1585-86, when there came a sharp discussion over the details of Church government, that Brown, Harrison, Wright, Greenwood and others whom the Congregationalists regard as their prototypes separated from the movement." The Brown here mentioned is (on p. xxxvi) identified with a member of the Oxford Classis. Evidently there is confusion. Neither this Brown nor Thomas Harrison (the noted Hebraist of Cambridge) nor even Robert Wright was a Separatist. Browne and Harrison the Separatists were named Robert, and the first Separatist church was set up by Robert Browne at Norwich in 1581.

²¹ *Synodalis*, Cardwell. Vol. I, pp. 164-166, note; p. 245, note. Cf. Whitley, S., Introduction, pp. l-li.

seems clear that they did their utmost to make the state of Nonconformists unbearable. John Smith (see above) found this and was driven by it to the last extremity of protest; Richard Bernard of Worksop found it and had his spirit broken thereby;²² while as to the people generally, could words be more explicit than those of Bradford (*History*, p. 14)? "After these things they could not long continue in any peaceable condition, but were hunted and persecuted on every side, so as their former afflictions were but as flea-bitings in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taken and clapt up in prison, others had their houses beset and watched night and day, and hardly escaped their hands; and the most were fain to flie and leave their howses and habitations, and the means of their livelehood."

Such was the experience which Dr. Usher calls lenient. Moreover, according to the same unimpeachable witness, it was the climax of what had been going on for years. "The work of God was no sooner manifested in them [the local Puritans] but presently they were scoffed and scorned by the prophane multitude, and ye ministers urged with ye yoke of subscription, or els must be silenced; and ye poore people were so vexed with apparators and pursuivants, and ye commissarie courts as truly their affliction was not small, which, notwithstanding, they bore sundrie years with much patience" (*History*, p. 12).

But Dr. Usher's contention is that all the trouble thus related — except the five cases — was of private origin. It was the work of malicious and treacherous "relatives and neighbors." He asserts this as if he knew, and speaks of it as a most important fact, and dilates upon it in romantic strain (p. 18). But he cites no authority nor does he seem to have any outside the passage last quoted from

²² He almost "separated" — at first he showed the greatest eagerness to go forward and he actually refused to subscribe — but he soon sued for "reinstatement" in ways which excited Smith's scorn. Whitley, S. Vol. II, pp. 335, 336, 370.

Bradford.²³ Here indeed it is said that the "prophane multitude" scoffed and scorned. It was growing to be a fashion with the "prophane multitude" so to behave towards the Puritan. But was it the profane multitude that urged ministers with the yoke of subscription or silenced them, or vexed the poor people with apparitors and pursuivants and the commissary courts? At any rate, does the profane multitude stand for relatives and neighbours? Are we to imagine these to have been so hostile that there was no living in peace on account of their daily nagging, scoffing, and deriding? Are we to think of them too as traitors, scheming continually to set the officers of law in motion? Dr. Usher would have us think so. But he adduces no evidence — either positive or negative — to bear him out.

2. Even less credible is the assertion that there is no substance in the traditional charge of harshness on the part of the Bishops against the Puritans. "As a matter of fact the Puritan clergy were not persecuted." This categorical reversal of what might have seemed a firmly established judgment is based on facts (says Dr. Usher) which go to show "that the overwhelming majority of the Puritans accepted the established church and remained members of it, read its Prayer Book, and performed voluntarily its ceremonies." Of the sixty Puritan clergy who were temporarily deprived or suspended in 1604-5, "the great majority soon conformed, accepted the tests prescribed by Bancroft and continued to preach in their parishes without molestation." We are asked, therefore, to conclude that Bancroft's régime was not "one of great harshness and injustice." The small number of the ejected proves it, and the Scrooby people in flying to Holland were flying from a shadow. "Indeed the Puritans and Bishops

²³ Unless it be Cotton Mather's *Magnalia*. Bk. II, sec. 3 (as cited by Dexter, E. H. P., p. 391) where it is said that Bradford encountered the "wrath of his uncles" and "the scoff of his neighbours." Mather is not a good witness; but even if he were, what he says refers only to Bradford.

taunted the Pilgrims with running away from a persecution which did not exist."

All this strikes one as a strange misreading of the facts. The king's threat to harry the Puritans out of the land is certain;²⁴ Bancroft's jubilant sympathy with that attitude is certain;²⁵ canon thirty-six of the one hundred and forty-one agreed upon by Bancroft and the rest of the bishops and clergy, in their Synod of London in 1603, is certain; the proclamation enjoining conformity to the form of the service of God established (July, 1604) is certain. Bancroft's circular letter (December 22, 1604) to the bishops of the southern province, urging them to a stringent execution of the king's command, is certain.²⁶ It is certain also that petitions from disaffected Puritans, cleric and lay, beseeching consideration and tolerance, were treated as seditious and their bearers or promoters in some cases imprisoned.²⁷ No less certain is it that resentment, deep and widespread, was in this way evoked, chiefly against the prelates "who have reviled and disgraced both in Pulpit and in Press, their brethren"; and have "also suspended, deprived, degraded, and imprisoned them, yea, caused them to be turned out of house and home, deny'd them all benefit of law, and used them with such contempt and contumely as if they were not worthy to live upon the face of the earth."²⁸ Yet there was no persecution!²⁹ How could there be, argues Dr.

²⁴ Usher, *Reconstruction of the English Church*. Vol. I, p. 327.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, *passim*.

²⁶ The circular enclosed a letter from the Privy Council to say that the time of grace notified "the 16th day of July last," for the recalcitrants having now expired, it is the king's firm determination that since advice has not prevailed "authority shall compel."

²⁷ Whitley, S. Vol. I, p. li.

²⁸ A Christian and modest offer of a most indifferent conference. Pamphlet by some "of the late silenced and deprived ministers." Imprinted 1606. Rylands Library (uncatalogued).

²⁹ Dr. Usher's own words may be quoted against him: "The severe penalties attached" (to the canons of 1604) "showed that the canons were meant to be obeyed, that a new day had dawned, when there should not only be law but penalties for break-

Usher, seeing that in a year or two Puritan clamor and revolt died away? One might argue much the same from the effects upon a stricken country of a tyrant's conquest. He makes a desolation and calls it peace. Granted that the Puritans became acquiescent, did they become so willingly? Let their uprising a generation later supply the answer. They became acquiescent because, for the time being, the severity of the pressure upon them was more than they could bear. Only a few here and there disclosed an endurance which refused to be broken, and who were these? They were the people of Gainsborough and Scrooby. Their constancy is glorified by the Puritan surrender. Starting from the same grounds, they advanced to all the successive positions which these involved and took the consequences. That is the plain truth of the matter. Separation was the last step, and its consequences were provided by the act of April, 1593, which decreed that "if any person above sixteen years of age . . . shall obstinately refuse" to go to some authorized church, he, "being thereof lawfully convicted, shall be committed to prison, there to remain without bail or main prize"; shall be kept there three months, and, if still obstinate, shall then "upon his corporal oath" "abjure this realm of England and all other the Queen Majesty's dominions forever"; and if, having so sworn, he "shall not go to such haven and within such time as is before appointed," or, "shall return into Her Majesty's dominions without Her Majesty's special licence," he "shall be adjudged a felon" and die a felon's death. Furthermore, "all his goods and chattels" shall be forfeit to Her Majesty forever, and "all his lands" during his own life.³⁰

ing it and a coercive force sufficient to exact them from the guilty." *Reconstruction of the English Church*. Vol. I, p. 383.

³⁰ An act to retain the Queen's subjects in obedience. See Prothero, *Select Statutes, 1558-1625*, pp. 89-92. This act was continued by 39 Eliz. 18; 43 Eliz. 9; 1 James I, 25; 21 James I, 28.

The Scrooby and Gainsborough Separatists could evade this act only by secret flight, as those of the London Church had done in the previous decade. Can it be said that if they had chosen to stand their ground the act would not have been enforced? No one acquainted with the facts will so say. The act was enforced — as often as its victims were caught. It might not be enforced to death by public execution; but it was enforced by a slow death in prison.³¹ What a flash of light is thrown by the following extract from Thomas Helwys's *Mystery of Iniquity* (1612).³² It is addressed to the bishops:

“Let us persuade you in fear to God and shame to men to cast away all these courses we shall now mention. Do not when a poor soul by violence is brought before you, to speak his conscience in the profession of his religion to his God — do not first implore the oath *ex officio*. O, most wicked course! And if he will not yield to that, they imprison him closer. O, horrible severity! And if he will not be forced by imprisonment, then examine him on divers articles, without oath, to see if he may be entrapped anyway. O, grievous impiety! And if any piece of advantage (either in word or writing or by witness) can be gotten, turn the magistrates' sword upon him, or take his life. O, bloody cruelty! If no advantage can be found, get him banished out of his natural country and from his father's house; let him live or starve, it matters not. O, unnatural compassionateness without pity! Let these courses be far from you, for there is no show of grace, religion, nor humanity in these courses. This is to lie in wait for blood, and to lay snares secretly to take the simple to slay him.”

3. Dr. Usher's third proposition is that “the Pilgrims *voluntarily* left England” (p. 26). As there was nothing in their treatment which compelled them to leave, why did they go? He answers, because they had reached a state of mind to which “England was unclean” (p. 23). They must, therefore, depart for their souls' sake. “It was

³¹ In 1596 (see Preface to the Confession of Faith of certain people living in Exile, of that year) it was recorded that “twenty souls (including aged men and women) have perished in the prisons within the city of London only (besides other places of the land) and that of late years.”

³² Quoted by Burgess, Smith, p. 284.

dangerous to remain there longer, for those who would worship God in all sincerity and purity must guard against the pollution and contamination of the Beast" (p. 23). Their "vital objection to the Established Church was not so much its activity in persecution as its existence. . . . It was all a relic of Paganism, there was no warrant in Scripture for any of it. . . . To remain in contact with it was to risk defilement" (pp. 23, 24). Dr. Usher confounds physical with spiritual contact. Dr. Joseph Hall, Robinson's first assailant, did the same, and was told by Robinson to realize the difference. There was no reason (said he) to separate from England in order to separate from England's church, any more than to escape from Amsterdam in order to avoid its heresies and immoralities. Merely to be let alone was enough. In Amsterdam they were in the world, but not forced to be of it. Heretics and sinners of every sort might be around them, but they were not made to have fellowship with them in worship. In England it was otherwise. There the laws compelled them to be in and of a church which they adjudged to be Babylon. They could not come out of the church except by coming out of their "dear native land." Just that was the distressing grievance — a grievance which would have ceased at once if persecution had ceased. It is a libel to say that in their eyes "there was no one left in England with whom the Pilgrims might hope to have communion. . . . All was wrong, all was uncongenial, unclean, and from it they fled" (p. 25). They were no such churls or Pharisees. But for the severity of the laws and the rigor with which they were administered, it is past all doubt that Robinson, Brewster, and the rest would have rejoiced to stay at home and to let their witness to the "truth" speak for itself. It is one thing to say that they had no right to expect so much tolerance. It is quite another to suggest that so much was offered to them and spurned. It is not "a great

error to stress the hostility of the church toward them and say that they were harried from the land " (p. 22). It is the simple fact.

III

By May, 1609, Robinson and his people were settled at Leyden. They had gone there after a few months at Amsterdam — months of disillusionment. For the sister church of Johnson and Ainsworth was not what they had hoped. Its principles were their own, but not its temper. This had become excited by controversy and enflamed by personal quarrels. There was consequently too little scope for that quiet growth of Christian character and life which to Robinson was the church's chief end. In addition, there was John Smith with his ultra-scrupulous conscience, so keen for the truth but so unable (at present) to mark off what really mattered from what was of comparative unimportance. Already (1608) he had stepped forward with his (six) *Differences of the Separation*, and was exalting them into a touchstone of communion. The effect was to kindle a flame in which love and peace could not live. In the particular points at issue Robinson, on the whole, may have agreed rather with Smith than with Johnson. But they were points which he did not wish his people to agitate. They were not trivial, but they were not essential. The essential things were inward and spiritual. He looked round, therefore, for some quiet resting place where the Church in its worship might attend to these without distraction. This, I am sure, is nearer the truth than to say, with Dr. Usher, that Robinson and his people " decided to seek some place where there were neither heretics nor English, some place where they should live as nearly as might be alone and observe together the ordinances of God whose perpetuation was the prime motive of their exodus from Scrooby " (p. 33).

We have no reports of Robinson's ordinary discourses. His literary record is made up for the most part of con-

troversial writings; and this may easily give the impression that controversial topics were those which absorbed his ministry. But the impression is corrected if we bear in mind that the controversies were of strictly occasional origin. Each was called forth by specific attacks which, in justice to his cause and his congregation he did not feel at liberty to ignore. Moreover, it is clear that he felt constrained to put all his strength into the fray when once he had become engaged; and it is not strange if sometimes (in the manner of the day) he wasted his strength and weakened his argument by violent language. But even so moderation was the prevailing note of his writing, nor did he either love or seek controversy. Hence it is difficult to imagine him engaging his hearers week by week with a defense of "ordinances." It is much easier to imagine him taking the "ordinances" for granted as mercies to be enjoyed with thanksgiving, and devoting himself usually to such subjects of moral and spiritual interest as are treated of in his *Essays*. Indeed, every one of these, as to substance, might well have been a sermon, and lets us deeper into the habitual mind of the man than any of his polemical work. "Disputations in religion," he says in one place,

"are sometimes necessary, but always dangerous; drawing the best spirits into the head from the heart, and leaving it either empty of all, or too full of fleshly zeal and passion if extraordinary care be not taken still to supply and fill it anew with pious affections towards God and loving towards men" (*Essays*, VII).

"Pious affections towards God and loving towards men"—this double aim pervades most of his *Essays*. Does it not indicate a true conception of his weekly homilies? The men and women who looked up to him from the benches in the big room of his house were mostly simple laboring folk, laboring and heavy-laden. They looked up for bread of the kind that would turn to inward comfort, strength, and light. Their daily life was hard and made

them hungry for such bread. May we not regard it as a sign of his wisdom and love in breaking it for them that, unlike the bickering church at Amsterdam, they dwelt in peace to the end of his days, and nourished a wealth of manly virtues which enabled them to survive alike the trials of their lot in Leyden and the rigors of their experience in the new world? Sound doctrine was good, right ordinances of worship were good, but both were means to an end, viz., Christian lives, and the Leyden pastor never lost sight of this. His reward appeared in men and women whose Christian lives were of the heroic strain, and became his "living epistle" to the world.

IV

Robinson lived at Leyden from May, 1609, to his death on March 1, 1625. On one occasion there is a glimpse of him at Rotterdam along with some other members of the church who attended Mr. Brewer so far, on his ominous journey to England;³³ and of course he may have made many other excursions from Leyden. But the inference *e silentio* is that he "dwelt among his own people" in studious seclusion, except for the pastoral duties which were a part of his proper work. According to Bradford "he taught" his people "thrice a week"; and, if his weekly sermons or lectures brought home to them his "singular abilities in Divine things", they did so because of the many hours of thought and prayer which went to their making. Probably his appointment as pastor took place at Amsterdam,³⁴ while William Brewster was "called

³³ Sir William Zouche to Sir Dudley Carleton, Rotterdam, Saturday, November 13, 1619: "About ten of the clock (last night) Master Brewer arrived, conveyed hither by the Beadle of the University, Master [John] Robinson and Master Keble [John Keble] accompanied by two other of his friends: their names, I think, are not worth the asking." Arber, S. P. F., p. 224.

³⁴ See Preface to the Treatise of Religious Communion (Ashton, Vol. III, p. 103), where Robinson says he was "excepted against" by some of John Smith's people, when he was "chosen into office in this (Leyden) Church." This could only have happened at Amsterdam.

and chosen " elder ³⁵ on an early date at Leyden (*History*, p. 24). Under their guidance — double in function but single in aim and spirit — the church " grew in knowledge and other gifts and graces of the spirit of God, and lived together in peace and love and holiness; and many came unto them from divers part of England, so as they grew a great congregation " (*Ibid.*, p. 24).

Moreover, though he never sought great things for himself, great influence came to him in the city. Leyden, with its young university, was the centre of a chronic and bitter conflict between Calvinists and Arminians. Polyander for the former and Episcopius for the latter divided " the students and other learned men " into a mutual hostility so great " that few of the disciples of the one would hear the other teach." Robinson, though a high Calvinist, was not a mere partisan. " He went constantly to hear their readings [or lectures] and heard the one as well as the other." Also, in " sundry disputes " he intervened to such effect that " he began to be terrible to the Arminians." In fine, he was induced — much against his wish — to stand up in set debate with Episcopius, who " put forth his best strength," but, according to Bradford, was put " to an apparent non plus . . . in a great and public audience." This occurred more than once, and " procured him much honour and respect from those learned men and others who loved the truth " (*History*, p. 28). Robinson was already a member of the university, and it is hinted that but for the fear of " giving offence to the State of England " some office, presumably as teacher, might have been found for him.

Thus amid tokens of local favor and the warm affection of his people nine years went by. Then there came a change. The fact had to be faced that the church, though

³⁵ Deacons also were appointed, but not a teacher nor a widow or deaconess — which is remarkable in view of Robinson's Appendix to Mr. Perkins' six principles of Christian Religion, questions 12-17, Robinson's works. Vol. III, pp. 429, 430, Ashton's ed.

united and prosperous, was suffering a certain loss. Conditions of life were hard and deterred many of the homeland from coming or adhering to them. "Some preferred and chose the prisons in England rather than liberty in Holland with these afflictions." Among themselves also many "in the best and strength of their years," despite "a resolute courage," were sinking into a "premature old age," while the young were robbed of their youthfulness. Worse still, there were some of the latter who, "getting the reins off their necks," ran away from the daily round of "heavy labours." "Some became soldiers, others took upon them far voyages by sea and others some worse courses, tending to dissoluteness, and the danger of their souls, to the great grief of their parents and the dishonour of God" (*History*, pp. 30-32).³⁶ In short, it seemed probable that continuance at Leyden spelt a gradual approach to extinction. So, warned thus by "the grave mistris Experience . . . those prudent governors [Robinson and Brewster], with sundrie of ye sagest members, begane both deeply to apprehend their present dangers and wisely to foresee ye future and thinke of timly remedy" (*History*, p. 29). There is no need here to recount how the remedy was attempted, delayed, and at length accomplished. It is enough to remark that the final issue from a long series of difficulties was not a little due to the pastor's Christian temper, sagacity, and tact. His

³⁶ Winslow adds as other reasons of unrest: (1) that they felt it grievous to live from under the protection of the State of England; (2) that there was a likelihood of losing the English language, the English names, and the English type of education; (3) that they were conscious of inability "to do good" among the Dutch, particularly in "reforming the Sabbath." *Young's Chronicles*, p. 381. A final compelling motive was "a great hope and inward zeal they had of laying some good foundation, or at least to make some way thereunto, for ye propagating and advancing of the Gospel of the kingdom of Christ in those remote parts of ye world; yea, though they should be but even as stepping-stones unto others for ye performing of so great a work." *Bradford, History*, p. 32. Dr. Usher (p. 44) takes no note of this strong missionary impulse, and he introduces motives for removal — e.g., "active controversy as to the validity of their own fundamental conclusions" — of which neither Bradford nor Winslow says anything. Nay, this is the very libel against which Winslow wrote to protest. *Young's Chronicles*, p. 380.

“singular abilities in devine things” did not prevent him from being “very able to give directions in civill affaires, and to foresee dangers and inconveniences; by which means he was very helpfull to their outward estats and so was every way as a commone father unto them” (*History*, p. 25). When the time came for leaving Leyden, Robinson spent “a good part of the day” in preaching from Ezra 8 2. The rest of the time was given to prayer — though according to Winslow, space was found for a feast in the pastor’s house furnished by those remaining behind for those about to sail. The date was Thursday, July 20, 1620. Next day all (or most) went by canal to Delfshaven (twenty-four miles away), where the *Speedwell* lay ready. “That night was spent with little sleep by the most, but with friendly entertainment and Christian discourse and other real expressions of true Christian love” (*History*, p. 73). On Saturday, July 22, “the wind being fair, they who were to sail went aboard and their friends with them.”³⁷ When at last the tide called those who were not going to leave the ship, “their Reverend Pastor falling down on his knees (and they all with him) with watery cheeks commended them with most fervent prayers to the Lord and his blessing. And then with mutual embraces and many tears they took their leaves one of another, which proved to be the last leave to many of them” (*History*, p. 73).

Robinson stayed with the majority at Leyden,³⁸ by desire and decision of the church, but much against his own inclination. He longed for the opportunity of reunion, and hoped it would come soon. Individuals of the Leyden remnant went over from time to time. In 1627 many went. His own turn never came. It was not so much the lack of means that hindered as the opposition of certain persons

³⁷ Winslow says, “We only going aboard” i.e., those about to sail. Young’s *Chronicles*, p. 384.

³⁸ “But take notice—the difference of number was not great.” Winslow, Young’s *Chronicles*, p. 384.

in England, whom he calls the "forward preachers." These "of all others" — he wrote to Brewster, December 20, 1623 — "are unwilling I should be transported, especially such of them as have an eye that way themselves; as thinking if I come ther, thee market will be mard in many regards" (*History*, p. 199). On the 19th of the same month, in a letter to Bradford, he speaks of the comfort there would be in a talk face to face; "but seeing that cannot be done, we shall always long after you and love you and waite God's apoynted hour. . . . My wife with me re-salute you and yours. Unto him who is ye same to his in all places and nere to them which are farr from one another I commend you and all with you." In April, 1626, the two leaders heard of Robinson's death from a letter written by Roger White, his brother-in-law, and dated Leyden, April 28, 1625. He had died on March 1. His illness began on Saturday evening, February 22. Nevertheless, next day he preached twice. In the days of the week following he grew weaker, but felt no pain. "He was sensible to the very last, and his friends came freely to him. . . . If either prayers, tears, or means would have saved his life, he had not gone hence."³⁹ His loss, indeed, seemed irreparable. Looking backward from a later time, Bradford wrote that "though they esteemed him highly whilst he lived and laboured amongst them, yet much more after his death, when they came to feele ye wante of his help and saw (by woeful experience) what a treasure they had lost, to ye greefe of their harts and wounding of their sowls; yea, such a loss as they saw could not be repaired" (*History*, p. 25). Some were inclined to think that his death, occurring "even as fruit falleth before it is ripe,

³⁹ He was buried in St. Peter's on March 4, many university professors and other eminent citizens being present. The church register shows that nine florins were paid for opening the grave. This sum was customary "for burials between the ordinary hours of 12 M. and 1.30 P.M." See Dexter, E. H. P., p. 592. But cf. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 3d series. Vol. IX, 1846. *Memoirs of the Pilgrims of New England*, pp. 55, 56, by George Sumner.

when neither length of days nor infirmity of body did seem to call for his end," should be taken, for some reason, as a sign of the divine anger.⁴⁰ At any rate, he passed just when the Leyden section of the church was about to stand most in need of him.⁴¹ This will appear if we glance at the way in which his mind in relation to the matter of Separation had developed.

V

Dr. Usher says that "Robinson's opinions changed from year to year" (p. 192); and implies that his position at any given time is, therefore, difficult to define. It is a reckless statement. He was the very opposite of John Smith in this respect. Substantially he stood at the end of his course where he stood at its outset — I mean that he still maintained the necessity of separating from the corrupt worship and government of the English Church, and of gathering true believers into a true church-estate. But truth was more to him than consistency. Whether we have his exact words or not in the Farewell Address ascribed to him by Winslow, it is certain that we have his meaning. "He charged us before God and his blessed angels to follow him no further than he followed Christ; and if God should reveal anything to us by any other instrument of his, to be as ready to receive it as ever we were to receive any truth by his ministry; for he was very confident the Lord had more truth and light yet to break

⁴⁰ Letter of Thomas Blossom to Governor Bradford, Leyden, December 15, 1625. Young's *Chronicles*, pp. 480-483.

⁴¹ Of Robinson's six children (John, Bridget, Isaac, Mercey, Fear, and James), one was buried in St. Peter's, Leyden, on February 7, 1621, and another on March 27, 1623, which of them, does not appear. Bridget was married at Leyden in May, 1629, to John Grynwich, student of theology, and her mother attended as a witness. Isaac went to New England in 1631, and was still living in 1702 — aged 92. Mrs. Robinson "is recorded as in Leyden as late as April 6, 1646, and Hoornbeeck states that she and her children, "joined the Dutch church." *E. H. P.*, pp. 591, 592 and Arber, p. 160. There is no good foundation for the Robinson New England pedigree as made out by Dr. Allen. Vol. I, pp. lxxv ff., Ashton. Mrs. Robinson's will, dated Leyden, 1692, has been found.

forth out of his holy word.”⁴² His growth toward wider vision was the reward of this attitude.

At first he had no doubt of the absolutely anti-Christian character of the English Church. In his earliest writing entitled *An Answer to a Censorious Epistle* (by Dr. Joseph Hall), 1609, he will not admit that the English Church is in any point “the Temple of God compiled and built of spiritually hewn and lively stones, and of the cedars, firs, and thyme trees of Lebanon,” but, on the contrary, is “a confused heap of dead and defiled and polluted stones, and of all rubbish of briers and brambles of the wilderness, for the most part fitter for burning than building.” It is, therefore, intolerable; and “we take ourselves rather bound to shew our obedience in departing from it than our valour in purging it, and to follow the prophet’s counsel in flying out of Babylon ‘as he-goats before the flock,’ Jeremiah 50 8.” To the like effect he wrote, but more elaborately, in his *Justification of Separation*, 1610. There is no hint of compromise at this stage. He can see nothing to admire or even endure, in the English “State-ecclesiastical.” His invective is worthy of Henry Barrow — whose arguments, indeed, he often repeats.

On February 25, 1610–11, Dr. William Ames wrote to Robinson a brief letter on the question, “Whether there be not a visible communion out of the visible Church.” In other words, is not evident Christian character a sufficient reason for fellowship with a person? The implication is that Robinson denied this, and made it a condition of fellowship not merely that the person should be a member of some visible church but also a member of the true church. Ames rightly describes this as the “very bitterness of Separation,” and urges Robinson to reconsideration. Surely, he pleads, there “can be no other sufficient reason why we should communicate with visible churches but only because we visibly

⁴² Young’s Chronicles, Winslow’s Brief Narration, p. 397.

discern that they have communion with Christ." If Christ owns a person inside or outside a visible church, are you to refuse him, or a church so far as it visibly contains the like of him? Robinson, in a belated reply, showed himself not yet able to appreciate so simply Christian a principle. He is still fettered by the formal logic of Separatism. "External communion is a matter of external relation and order, under which men out of the church are not." For example, Christians outside the church may pray together though it is their duty to come inside; but for members of the church to pray with non-members or with members of a false church is a breach of church order and relation (*vitium ordinis et relationis*). Thus the effect of church membership was a deplorable narrowing of Christian fellowship. But by 1614 when he published the treatise *Of Religious Communion, Private and Public*, his view as regards the former has broadened. He has come to see the distinction there is between personal and church actions. He sees that private communion is a personal action which need not infringe "any set order of any church." He sees further that in a subconscious sort of way he has always been of that persuasion, but that a vehement desire of peace, together with some weakness, has deterred him from making his mind quite clear to himself. Now, however, his mind is clear and his will resolute on the point. He is prepared to practise and defend private communion with all visible Christians to the fullest extent possible (p. 65).

But for a man who cherished the desire "to learn further or better what the will of God is" (p. 103), this could not be the end. There was bound to be a further enlargement of insight and tolerance. When, therefore, such a question as the "lawfulness" of occasional attendance at the services of the English Church for the purpose of hearing the Word was thrown up by the course of events, Robinson was at no loss for the right answer. It is signifi-

cant that the question was thrown up in Henry Jacob's church, Southwark, London, for Jacob (1563-1624) was a liberal spirit. Some of his people had felt no scruple in going now and then to a parish church. On this account they were disowned by a majority, including the teacher, and a young woman who did not at once leave off the practice was excommunicated. Two of the liberal minority, on going over to Leyden, were welcomed by the church there as a matter of course. But on being transferred later to Amsterdam, a small violent party prevailed to get one or both of them cast out. Both sides in both churches appealed to Leyden — the one in protest, the other in self-defence. Robinson (for himself and his people) wrote a letter to each and made it clear that his approval went entirely to those of a generous spirit and against those whose spirit was the reverse. As to the "Ancient Church" at Amsterdam he denounced a judgment of withering severity.

In the same year, 1624, he wrote a treatise on the subject,⁴³ stating and reasoning the case with his wonted thoroughness and fairness. The concluding paragraph sums up his final attitude. While reiterating an unchanged conviction that he "cannot communicate with or submit unto the [English] church-order and ordinances there established, either in state or act, without being condemned of mine own heart, and therein provoking God, who is greater than my heart, to condemn me much more," nevertheless he can say, "For myself, thus I believe with my heart before God, and profess with my tongue, and have before the world, that I have one and the same faith,

⁴³ The treatise was found in his study after his death, and held back for ten years because it was perceived that "some, though not many, were contrary-minded to the author's judgment." Then it was published in hope of staying the mischief wrought in the church by four or five men, particularly one, whose obstinate insistence on the same narrow course as Robinson condemned had recently rent the church and even reduced it to a fifth of its former numerical strength. The church still lingered in 1639 and even in 1647. Dexter, E. H. P., p. 593, note. But its members were all gradually absorbed by the Dutch churches or dispersed.

hope, spirit, baptism, and Lord, which I had in the Church of England and none other; that I esteem so many in that Church of what State or Order soever, as are truly partakers of that faith, as I account many thousands to be, for my Christian brethren, and myself a fellow-member with them of that one mystical body and Christ scattered far and wide throughout the world; that I have always in spirit and affection all Christian fellowship and communion with them, and am most ready, in all outward actions and exercises of religion, lawful and lawfully done, to express the same."

VI

Thus, by 1620, Robinson had risen above mere "negation." It was not of Separation that his mind was full but of communion, as far as might be. Hence the character of his last words to those who in that year were setting forth on their Great Adventure. They were not to go as Separatists, or Brownists, still less as Robinsonians, but as children of light, under the guidance of a living spirit who had already revealed to them a measure of truth, and would reveal yet more if they were faithful to His word. This was the principle — a positive, not a negative, principle — which inspired the Pilgrim movement. On the whole, the men and women who bore it in their hearts to the New World remained true to its impulse, and so bore in them, notwithstanding many temporary failures, the seeds of that comprehensive progress in Church and State, which has been a characteristic feature of the American people. Expressed in terms of the Church it meant that all its members (to use the accepted phrase) were Prophets, Priests, and Kings. In other words, all had direct access to God; all were privileged to learn and speak forth his will; all might be endued with his conquering power. So the Church was a spiritual democracy; and when the men who formed it turned to the task of con-

stituting a political State, inevitably they proceeded on democratic lines. Nor was it strange if, at the same time, they conceived Church and State to be, in like manner, a theocracy, for both alike were to be ruled by God's law. It was in respect of this Divine law — its seat and scope and interpretation — that the Church went astray, and for a time led the State astray. By ascribing to the Scriptures an absolute authority for all things pertaining to the conduct of life, whatever its sphere, the Pilgrims put an embargo on freedom of thought and action. But they were not singular in this. They were only singular inasmuch as they applied the rule of scriptural authority more thoroughly than other Puritans or Protestants. And they were more thorough in applying Scripture because their eye was more single. To believe in anything as a word of God was for them but the first step to obedience. And so unwittingly, they were on the way to that higher standpoint of the modern Christian mind which seeks to sift the chaff from the wheat in the Scriptures *just because of its loyalty to the word of God, and its vision that the word of God cannot be inconsistent with any word of truth.*

In short, the positive principle of unreserved loyalty to the known will of God, on which the Pilgrims based their covenant, was a vital principle out of which in due course, was bound to come the light to see and the power to transcend whatever hindered the normal growth of the church or the individual. And if this was the principle which Robinson's men were the first to plant in the New World, then plainly Dr. Usher is wrong when he speaks of them as "choosing the wilderness because it seemed impossible to find anywhere in England or Holland a body of people who *thought exactly as they did.*"⁴⁴ "They maintained unflinchingly at Plymouth an ideal which had long ceased to have a numerous following in England." Hence their "lack of numerical growth at Plymouth." More than its

⁴⁴ Italics mine.

isolated position or its economic drawbacks, the ecclesiastical exclusiveness of Plymouth was the "secret" of its failure to grow. They stood for "a negation, nothing more than an uncompromising hostility to the established Church of England and to the ordination of Bishops" (p. 188).⁴⁵ Thus the Pilgrims were isolated — one might even say boycotted — because of their exclusiveness. And, proceeds Dr. Usher, "nowhere does this isolation . . . reveal itself more clearly than in their difficulties in finding a minister" (p. 189).

Here at last is a point we can test. His only reference is to the mission of Allerton to England in 1626–27, where "he was to find a clergyman, but experienced such difficulties . . . that he finally brought back with him a man who soon gave clear proof of insanity." Turning to Bradford's account of Allerton's mission we find no mention of any mandate "to find a clergyman"; but we do find that when Allerton arrived with one in 1628 he was severely taken to task for his presumption.⁴⁶ In fact, there is not the least proof that the Pilgrims ever went in search of a minister or were "nonplussed" (Usher, p. 190) to find one. So long as Brewster and Bradford lived, they were content with their "ministry of the word," though sorry to miss the sacraments. They were glad of a regular pastor when he could be had, and, if worthy, paid him all due deference. But their church theory did not require him, except for the *bene esse* of a church. The *esse* consisted of the people, and there was nothing of principle to prevent them ordaining Brewster, Bradford, or any other of their

⁴⁵ Cf. p. 193, "So far as they [the Pilgrims] could discover after 1630, there was not in all England one man of real ability who believed as they did, nor were there any laymen of real ability who came to Plymouth in any number to strengthen the Pilgrim State."

⁴⁶ Not 1626 or 1627 — "This year (1628) Mr. Allerton brought over a young man for a minister to the people here, *whether upon his own head or at the motion of some friends there*" (italics mine) "*I well know not, but was without the Church's sending.* . . . His name was Mr. Rogers, but they perceived upon some trial that he was crazed in his brain. Mr. Allerton was much blamed." History, p. 292.

number to the pastorate. If they looked outside for one, it can only have been from a sense of their own insufficient training.

Passing by some other misconceptions,⁴⁷ I will mention what I take to be the greatest — viz., that the Pilgrims and the Puritans who “come to New England in 1630 and after” were sharply antagonistic to each other in their relation to the English Church (Usher, p. 186). For what is the fact? In parting from his friends at Delfshaven, Robinson had said, “There will be no difference between the unconformable ministers and you when they come to the practice of the ordinances *out of the kingdom*.”⁴⁸ And so it came to pass. When the first Puritan colonists came to Salem in 1629 they came with a prejudice against the Plymouth Church. It was supposed to be an embodiment of Brownism. But a few weeks sufficed to change their mind. On May 11, Governor Endicott wrote to Bradford a letter of thanks for the service of the Plymouth doctor and deacon, Mr. Fuller, and to say how much he rejoices to have been satisfied by him, “touching your judgments of the outward form of God’s worship. It is, as far as I can gather, no other than is warranted by the evidence of truth and the same which I have professed and maintained ever since the Lord in mercy revealed himself unto me; being far from the common report that hath been spread of you touching that particular.”⁴⁹

This was not mere compliment, for on July 20, the Salem Puritans proceeded to choose a pastor and teacher in a manner nowise different from the Plymouth way —

⁴⁷ Thus, we are told that “we have comparatively few reliable indications” of “Pilgrim belief aside from church government” (p. 93), although we know that their theology was Calvinistic, and that they “assented wholly to the 39 Articles and no less to the public confession of Faith put forth by the French Reformed Churches,” see Arber, pp. 289, 294. Stranger still, we are told that “we have no authentic hint” as to whether they knelt to receive (the Lord’s Supper) “or sat” (p. 197); although the idea of them kneeling is unthinkable.

⁴⁸ Young’s *Chronicles*, Winslow’s *Brief Narrative*, p. 398 and note.

⁴⁹ *History*, pp. 317, 318.

the pastor being Mr. Skelton and the teacher Mr. Higginson, both of whom by submitting to reordination virtually gave up their status in the English Church. Then on August 6, there was a choice and ordaining of elders and deacons, and on this occasion, delegates from Plymouth, including Governor Bradford, were present. Delayed by "crosswinds" they arrived late, but came "into the assembly afterward and gave them the right hand of fellowship, wishing all prosperity and blessed success unto such good beginnings." What happened to this first company happened also to the second which came over in the spring of 1630 led by John Winthrop.⁵⁰ So with later companies — though it may be going too far to take it for literal truth "that the rest of the churches in New England came at first to them at Plimoth to crave their direction in church courses and made them their Pattern."⁵¹ It was, indeed, not a case of taking the Plymouth church for a "pattern." There were, from the first, features in the Bay churches more or less peculiar to themselves.⁵² But the point is that *so far as the Plymouth Church was Separatist, they too became Separatist* and were moved in that direction rather than deterred by the Plymouth example. Thus not repulsion but convergence is found between the Pilgrims and the main body of the Puritans "who came to New England in 1630 and after" (Usher, p. 186).

And there was convergence because the new comers were at last free to follow the impulse which lay at the heart of Puritanism and had been followed by the Pilgrims all along.⁵³ Bradford (quoting John Cotton) means

⁵⁰ For particulars, see Dexter, C., p. 416.

⁵¹ So W. Rathband in his *Briefe Narration of Some Church Courses*. This was said to him by Mr. W(inslow)?, an eminent man in the church at Plymouth in 1644, and is repeated by Robert Baillie in *A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time*, 1645 (p. 54).

⁵² The Plymouth church, e.g., had no "teacher" and its idea of what belonged to the function of ruling elder was different.

⁵³ Perhaps the most striking instance of this is John Cotton who before leaving old Boston heard with "grief" and "wonder" of the Puritan decline to Separatist ways in New England, but took to them himself when he got there in 1633. Dexter, C., p. 422.

this when he says, "there was no agreement" (of the two parties) "by any Solemn or common consultation, but it is true they did, as if they had agreed by the same spirit of truth and unity, set up by the help of Christ the same model of churches, one like to another; and if they of Plymouth have helped any of the first comers in their theory, by hearing and discerning their practices, therein the Scripture is fulfilled that the kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took."⁵⁴ I may restate this important point by saying that the Pilgrims and the immigrant Puritans were able to meet each other half way inasmuch as the former, under the guidance of Robinson, had learned to relax their extreme emphasis on Separation while the latter were driven to become Separatist, notwithstanding their boast of unity with the mother-church, under the influence of a new environment acting upon the inner logic of their creed. And if this be so, then we must say that another view put forward by Mr. Champlin Burrage (*Early English Dissenters*, vol. I, chap. 14), requires considerable qualification. His view is somewhat difficult to summarize; but he seems to maintain that the Puritans went out thinking themselves to be still a part of the English Church. And this may be granted — though the thought was a product of sentiment rather than of understanding. He seems to maintain, again, that they were, at the same time, already Puritan Independents of a presbyterian type. And this also may be granted — though this fact, if they were conscious of it, ought to have suggested to them the absurdity of talking, as some did, of a merely "local secession" from the church. He maintains further that, with the passing years, and even by 1650, the practically congregational, but presbyterianized, churches established by the Puritans had so reacted upon the Plymouth church as to make it "more and more like them." And this too may be granted to some ex-

⁵⁴ Young's Chronicles, Governor Bradford's Dialogue, p. 426.

tent—though the Presbyterian element is hardly traceable down to the death of “the good elder Mr. Thomas Cushman” on December 11, 1691.⁵⁵ But when Mr. Burrage maintains that “the early Puritan congregations were principally, if not wholly, organized after their own ideals, and owed little or nothing to the Plymouth church, whose “influence was evidently infinitesimal,” he is wrong. For he can maintain this only on the assumption, which he appears to make, that the Plymouth church was still rigidly Separatist. This is the assumption of Dr. Usher, and, as I have pointed out, is contrary to the evidence.

There is one respect in which the Pilgrims, whatever else they may have yielded to the increasing dominance of the Puritans, did not yield without a struggle, if at all.⁵⁶ Robinson in one of his essays (the seventh) argues for civil tolerance of error, “considering that neither God is pleased with unwilling worshippers, nor Christian societies bettered nor the persons themselves neither, but the plain contrary in all three . . . and to that of the Father (Augustine) — ‘that many who at first serve God by compulsion come after to serve him freely and willingly’ — I answer, that neither good intents nor events, which are casual, can justify unreasonable violence, and withal, that by this course of compulsion many become atheists, hypocrites, and familists, and being at first constrained to practise against conscience, lose all conscience afterwards. Bags and vessels overstrained break, and will never after hold anything.”

This Christian wisdom of their beloved pastor was not forgotten by those who had known him, and by them, by their leaders especially, the spirit of it became a tradition

⁵⁵ He was more than a ruling elder in the presbyterian sense: “it being a profound principle of this Church, in their first formation . . . to choose none for ruling elders but such as were able to teach; which ability (as Mr. Robinson observes in one of his letters) other reformed churches did not require in their ruling elders.” *An Account of the Church of Christ in Plymouth*, by John Cotton, p. 49. Cushman had held office for forty-two years and had been practically pastor for ten or more.

⁵⁶ During the first two generations probably not at all.

of the church. Severity exercised, after much patience, towards hypocrites and knaves like Oldham, Lyford, and Morton was no departure from it. Nor is there any proof that difference of religious opinion or practice was visited with harsh treatment unless it issued in conduct dangerous to the common welfare. It would be unfair to expect from even the most charitable of the seventeenth century the same liberal view of supposed heresy and the same degree of leniency we have learned to hold and practise. But judged by the prevailing standard of their age, and, still more, by the example of their Puritan neighbors, the Pilgrims can be seen to have sustained a level of self-restraint in their relation to dissidents which does them honour.

The worst trial arose with the incursion of Quakers in 1656. They "much infested the country between the years 1650 and 1660, and proved very troublesome, and subverted many. The church of Plymouth, in particular, was much endangered by them — several of them wavering and trembling, but only one family wholly led astray." But "it may be observed to the honour of the colony that though the provocation of the Quakers was equally great here as elsewhere, yet they never made any sanguinary or capital laws against that sect as some of the colonies did" (Cotton's *Account of the Plymouth Church*, p. 118 and note).

For the most part this is true — though it is also true that even Plymouth caught fire from the prevailing fierceness and assented to measures unworthy of a noble past.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ There were no Quakers in New England before 1656. The first move toward persecution sprang from the General Court of Massachusetts. At its instance the Commissioners of the United Colonies issued circular letters to the General Court of each colony recommending certain action. Thus in 1658 it was recommended that "members of this cursed sect," "male or female," (1) should be banished under pain of severe corporal punishment; (2) should be punished accordingly if they returned and be banished again, under pain of death; (3) should accordingly suffer death if still they came back — "except they do then and there plainly and publicly renounce their said cursed opinions and devilish tenets." All the colonies agreed, including Plymouth. But in the

But there were those of the Pilgrim churches (for by this time the one had become several) who held by it, and it is a fitting close to mention that one of these was Isaac,⁵⁸ John Robinson's son, who let himself be disfranchised rather than be a party to persecution.

NOTE. — Dr. Whitley (in edition of John Smyth's works, Preface, pp. vii, viii) puts forth the startling suggestion that because — according to Morton Dexter — but seventeen of the Pilgrims hailed from Scrooby against thirty-two from Norfolk, the scene of Robinson's activity, the main source of the Pilgrim church has so far been unrecognized; and further that, because most of the emigrants from the North adhered to Smyth, "all the wealth of learning accumulated by Brown, Arber, Dexter, etc., is really introductory not so much to Robinson's story as to Smyth's." Is it not enough to point out by way of answer,

1. That, as a matter of fact, the core of the Leyden church was drawn from Scrooby; and that it was the Leyden church which initiated the pilgrimage to New England.
2. That this fact is not affected by the question how many joined Robinson at Leyden from Norfolk, even if we grant, what is not proved, that these were "mostly" his "relations and connections" — fruit of a problematical Norfolk ministry. Is there any evidence of a Norfolk ministry apart from that in Norwich?
3. That Smith and his group cannot in any real sense be spoken of as Pilgrim Fathers, since the movement they represent drained itself away in Holland. The name can be applied with fitness only to the one or two, like Francis Jessop, who finally joined the Leydenites.

Plymouth Colony, Thomas Hatherly, Captain Cudworth, Isaac Robinson, and some others suffered disfranchisement or "their place in the Government," sooner than consent. Deprived of its nobler element the Court of Plymouth colony passed many laws of great severity but none involving the death penalty. See *History of Scituate*, pp. 47-57, by Samuel Deane, Boston, 1831.

⁵⁸ At this time (1656) he was forty-six years of age and had been twenty-five years in the colony.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Arber, *S. P. F.* Story of the Pilgrim Fathers, 1887.
 Bradford, *History* History of "Plimoth Plantation," ed. 1910.
 Brown, *P. E.* The Pilgrims of New England, 1897.
 Burgess, *Smith* John Smith and the Pilgrim Fathers, 1911.
 Burrage, *N. F.* New Facts concerning John Robinson, 1913.
 Burrage, *E. E. D.* Early English Dissenters, 1912.
 Dexter, *C.* Congregationalism as seen in its Literature, 1879.
 Dexter, *E. H. P.* England and Holland of the Puritans, 1906.
 Hunter, *Collections* Collections concerning the Early History of the Founders of New Plymouth, 1849.
 Hunter, *Collections* Second Edition, enlarged, 1854.
 Usher, *P. and H.* The Pilgrims and their History, 1918.
 Whitley, *J. S.* Works of John Smyth, 2 vols., 1915.